



**HIU RECOMMENDED METHODOLOGY GUIDELINES**

**for DOCTORAL DISSERTATION**

Humboldt International University

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## **Abstract**

The HIU Recommended Methodology Guidelines for Doctoral Dissertation is a comprehensive framework designed to assist doctoral students in planning and conducting their research. This document outlines the key components of a research proposal and provides a general guide for the Humboldt International University research process. The guidelines cover a range of topics, including the formulation of research questions, the selection of research design and methodology, data collection and analysis, and the ethical considerations involved in conducting research. The HIU Recommended Methodology Guidelines are intended to help students produce high-quality dissertations that are both rigorous and relevant to their field of study.

## **Introduction**

A doctoral research project is a document that presents the fundamental approaches to undertake a dissertation or thesis and presents their plans for conducting the work. Before starting a research project, it is imperative that the student should summarize and substantiate what they plan to do, and why, consult with career professors, colleagues, or other stakeholders who might have some involvement in the development of the dissertation and will help them keep their research on track.

The author must be aware that it is necessary to identify unique and epistemic conditions, which will be clarified as the inquiry process develops, from which he/she will base his/her cognitive relationship with the reality that will be the object of study; define the disciplinary field of knowledge where the respective research will be carried out; select the thematic area, i.e., locate the specific scenario or topic of inquiry within a discipline and, once the topic is chosen, determine the object of study; select the thematic area, that is, locate the specific scenario or topic of inquiry within a discipline and, once the topic has been chosen, determine the object of study; finally, the topic must be transformed into a problem, within the framework of a clear mastery of the theoretical, methodological and technical discourses or foundations that will support the doctoral thesis.

It can be said that the object of study indicates what it is that one wants to know. In general, it arises from a problem or a concern, which may be the researcher's own or indicated by the person who commissions the research or by the educational institution that has its own lines of research.

It is important that the object of study is not too broad. When it is too broad, it becomes complex to delve into the subject, since the hours and resources may be insufficient. In addition, the

researcher often ends up wasting time searching for and processing information that, in the end, does not form part of the final work.

The following guidelines correspond to the concept of the Doctoral Dissertation as expressed in the policy of Humboldt International University which orients and involves a set of research activities, which are suggested to the student:

1. Select a problematic situation existing in your workplace, or in your professional/social sphere of performance and influence, which deserves to be solved, to contribute to the corresponding improvement and eventual solution of said problem.
2. Intervene the problem (problematize) with a scientific approach, which requires the identification and clear, clear, and supported with bibliographical and documentary evidence.
3. From the justification of the problem, define the purposes and questions of the research, which will be answered through a relevant methodological proposal, which includes the identification of the design and procedures to be followed in the fieldwork, as well as the definition of the population and the sample that will participate in the study.
4. Identify and select the instruments to answer the research questions by obtaining the necessary data and evidence required. On the other hand, it is necessary to identify the corresponding plan for discussion and analysis of the results obtained.
5. Present the final report with the relevant conclusions obtained in the study, as well as the recommendations suggested for future research in related areas and topics, contrasting the findings with the theoretical positions and the author/researcher's own opinions.

The doctoral candidate must follow the guidelines established by Humboldt International University both for the aspects related to the structural content of the doctoral dissertation, as well as for the guidelines regarding the format of the written work, which are contained in the

Doctoral Dissertation Guidelines Manual and in the APA 7.0 Standard.

These documents provide the respective orientations and guidelines to be followed by the student, in aspects related to both the content and format of the dissertation, respectively.

Special emphasis should be made in the writing, throughout the text, **in the third person**, avoiding the use of anglicisms and colloquial expressions that reflect the lack of academic quality of the written document. In this regard, the doctoral participant is reminded that the doctoral dissertation has three components:

a) Dissertation Project: Dissertation Project course focuses on the presentation of a topic and discussion of a research problem, preliminary literature review, and formulation of research questions related to the future dissertation.

b) Dissertation Proposal: which must include the first three chapters, namely Introduction, Bibliographical Review and Methodology. It is necessary to emphasize that the initial bibliographical review selected and indicated in the Dissertation Project must be expanded in an exhaustive and in-depth manner for the purposes of the Proposal. It should also be noted that it is required to consult texts and references that are up to date, and preferably that have been published in the last ten years, in order to discard obsolescence of the approaches and to maintain fidelity to the current state and validity of the theoretical and technical substrate that founds the dissertation applied, which does not imply being in detriment or disagreement with the inclusion of references with more time of edition, as long as the revision of the cited authors is required for the purpose of answering the questions raised in the respective study.

c) Dissertation Final Research: where the five required chapters of the doctoral work are presented, that is, those that have been developed in the Dissertation Project that have been expanded and deepened in the Proposal (1, 2 and 3), and that are enriched with the chapter Results obtained in

the study (4) and with the chapter of Discussion and Conclusions (5).

### **Topic Identification**

The first step in any research is to identify the topic of interest. Think about the areas that have most interested you in your studies to date, and what you would most like to explore or what the research unit might recommend as a line of work. Then start reading up on those topics to narrow your field of interest. As a general principle, it is better to research a narrow topic with more detail than a broad topic with little detail.

### **Title Definition**

Once you have a topic and a research question(s), you can decide on a title, which should broadly cover your research question(s) and summarize what you are going to do. You can and should use the designated thesis advisor to ask for a meeting to discuss your ideas, rather than trying to have an email discussion. Make a note of the ideas and questions, and then send a single email to your director requesting an appointment, and stating your thinking clearly, preferably with your outline research questions.

The Thesis Director will clarify if they think your ideas are too broad and will help you narrow them down. The Title should:

- It should be concise and specific, adequately reflect the objective of the thesis and the fundamental aspects that are emphasized in your work.
  - It must be sufficiently informative and precise in terms of content.
- It cannot be so broad that it claims an answer that cannot be given either by the data collected or by the methodology used, nor so short that it does not provide the required information.
- The use of infinitives should be omitted as this leaves the wording in the form of an objective and not a title.

- Title variants should be developed to be able to analyze the advantages and shortcomings of each of them. Finally, the director and the doctoral candidate will select the most appropriate variant. It must always contain precise terms.
- The terms in the title should be limited to those words that underline the significant content of the paper so that it is both understandable and findable.
- The words of the title must be selected, and care must be taken with the syntax, undoubtedly the most detrimental from the point of view of comprehension.

### **Legal Page**

The approval page must contain information with the identification data of the dissertation applied, referring to the title, author, institution that grants academic degree and ERIC descriptors written in English. It also contains the identification of the members of the Academic Committee and of the other university authorities currently in the office.

### **Abstract**

The Structured Abstract is placed after the approval page of the doctoral work and is recommended to be written after the completion of the applied dissertation. APA Standards provide a description of the elements that should be considered when writing the abstract of the applied dissertation. Its content should focus on a description of what was done in the research, as well as contemplate the following aspects written in a precise and synthetic way, according to the guidelines established in the HIU Dissertation Handbook

- a) Justified purpose to respond to the problematic situation raised in the study.
- b) Reasoned explanation of what was done in the research and of the theoretical/methodological bases on which the dissertation is based.
- c) Presentation of the relevant results obtained.



## Table of Content

The Table of Contents should be progressively elaborated and enriched as the research progresses. It should be included in the Final Report of the applied dissertation and should conform to the format required by the Dissertation Style Manual.

It is recommended that all chapters of the applied dissertation include an introductory paragraph and a closing paragraph.

### Chapter 1: Introduction

The doctoral candidate begins the writing of this chapter by identifying a theme within the area of research to be addressed and initially motivates the reader with general synthesized information about the content and scope of the dissertation applied.

**Research Problem:** is perceived as an area of conflict, concern, or controversy, which merits solutions and involves a discrepancy between what exists and what is aspired to or intended to be obtained through the respective research. A difference between what exists in the investigated reality and what is aspired to achieve through the corresponding study. It should reflect an existing need, even as a virtual reality, which is causing difficulties in the locus or research scenario. A need is something that is missing, and that the researcher will fill with some creative alternative, during the respective study.

The elaboration of the problem implies providing factual evidence, both from the existing literature in the corresponding area of study, as well as present in the experience of the concrete reality under investigation, through which the existence of a problematic situation that requires investigation is shown.

The focused, precise and concise delimitation of the problem situation that gives meaning to the research, accompanied by the support of a set of bibliographic, documentary or

institutional evidence that justifies the existence of the problem, make up the necessary condition required to indicate the possible contributions that will be obtained by carrying out the respective research. The selection criterion of the research problem corresponds to the interest and convenience of the researcher. Delimiting the problem implies answering the following questions: What, How, with what, When, Where, and for what purpose is the research being conducted?

**Background and justification:** the doctoral candidate must make special emphasis on the specific background of the research problem to be undertaken in the dissertation applied or the study to be conducted, by virtue of which it is suggested to include at least two substantial references that are linked to the nature of the proposed study. In this sense, reference is made to the current state of research on the dissertation. On the other hand, it is appropriate to point out the relevance that is considered necessary to address the corresponding study, through the required research procedures.

**Audience:** is the identification of the entities and subjects that may be affected or benefit from the research process to be conducted.

**Definition of terms** is the establishment of the scientific and complete definition that will be given to the categories and variables, which will be addressed in the respective study, reflecting the foundations.

Theoretical references that will support the research and that must be accompanied by the bibliographical support that will support the research. The citation of documentary, bibliographic and author references in the text of the doctoral work should be governed by the guidelines established by the APA Standards. Include as many terms as you consider relevant and necessary for the corresponding study, for which it is advisable to prepare a Conceptual Map containing the

valid terms for the research, which should be presented in an interrelated and correlational way.

**Purpose of the study:** before proceeding to the elaboration of the purpose of the research, the following criteria should be considered:

- a) Space-Time: it is about locating the object of research in a specific spatial-temporal environment. In what context and for how long will the research be conducted?
- b) Conceptual delimitation: What will be the area of knowledge to be addressed? Argue about the objects of research, with theoretical, conceptual, methodological, and technical substrates. Clarify the condition of the research: will it be a descriptive study, definitive research, or another type of research?
- c) Feasibility-Feasibility: to make explicit the possibilities of successful completion that the research has (feasibility), through which the efficiency of the study is demonstrated; to have the economic resources and the rationality in the management of the same (feasibility), to develop objectives and goals of the research, with which the effectiveness of the investigative work is demonstrated.

The purpose is the immediate goal (situational achievement) that will be reached by conducting the process (actions) of the research, and that is an option to solve the problem posed, which answers the question "Why will the research process be carried out? The wording of the purpose should clearly and precisely identify and define the key concepts or central ideas contained in the problem statement of the research project.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

The realization of any research project or study must be preceded by a systematic review of the available literature in relation to problems, issues or expected results linked to or close to the project. In this way, the author will have a systematic analysis of the contributions and

problems that have been presented to previous researchers. This involves a systematic search of other Theses or Articles published in Databases or other available sources.

This review of previous related research that has been developed makes up the background of the respective study and is intended to provide the theoretical, methodological, and technical support that underpins the research. It is what is commonly called the background of research and its purpose is to provide theoretical, methodological, and technical support for the research.

The purpose is to present the "state of the art", that is, the historical evolution and current developments in the research area or topic being addressed in the respective study. In other words, to construct practical discourse based on previous research experiences and existing theoretical principles in the field.

A literature review is a survey of academic sources on a specific topic. It provides an overview of current knowledge, allowing you to identify relevant theories, methods, and gaps in existing research.

Writing a literature review involves finding relevant publications, critically analyzing them, and explaining what you have found. There are five key steps:

1. Search for relevant literature
2. Evaluate sources
3. Identify issues, debates, and gaps
4. Outline the structure
5. Write your literature review

A good literature review does not just summarize the sources - it analyses, synthesizes and critically evaluates to give a clear picture of the state of knowledge on the subject.

The studies that are taken as background, should be presented in a narrative writing style

and be integrated to the aspects that have been focused, justified and presented in the research problem, with a written format that maintains a decreasing chronological order of publication, starting first with the most recent date, taking care that obsolescence has not invalidated some of the findings presented so far, but always respecting the style of writing used by the doctoral candidates.

The researcher must identify the bibliographical references consulted, to comment on them with the thematic, theoretical, and methodological relationship established in the problem statement of the respective study and must not conclude before establishing paragraphs that reflect coincidences and discrepancies between what is stated by the authors consulted and the author of the dissertation applied. In the same way, the author of the doctoral dissertation must identify and point out the components of the studies consulted and reviewed that will be assumed in the respective work.

The literature review should provide the following elements for the formation of the conceptual theoretical framework of the study in question:

A discussion of the theoretical-conceptual framework inherent in the research. A synthesis of the findings obtained in the respective area of research, which are related to the study problem posed, accompanied by the corresponding evidential supports. An indication of the dangers and weaknesses that may arise from the review of previous research design, as well as the strengths that should be assumed in a replication of a similar study.

A critique of the literature consulted, based on the methodological decisions that have been made in previous research that has been conducted in the respective area and that will be established, in an expanded manner, in the respective Proposal, corresponding to chapter three of the dissertation applied. A discussion of what the contributions would be, when undertaking a study

with the characteristics of the proposed research, including the indication of the variables and the research questions formulated.

For the literature search, the doctoral candidate should make use of the support offered by the bibliographic and documentary infrastructure of the library of Humboldt International University, as well as any other available bibliographic sources, for the realization of the corresponding chapter of the applied dissertation.

**Research Questions:** Research questions contribute to disaggregate the results to be achieved in the purpose of the research and allow the researcher to establish the actions to follow in his research or study. Therefore, the questions should be related to the respective purpose. Research questions should not be seen as a straitjacket, but as guidelines to be chained within the research scenario and help to clarify the central focus of the way forward in the respective study or research.

The study questions should be based on the purpose of the research, as well as the background of the systematic literature review. They should be developed based on the following guidelines:

1. Formulation of questions based on theory or on previous studies or research, or also, on the experience and current knowledge in research.
2. There should be a focused and clear wording, in terms of a question, which can be answered by the expected (and obtained) results of the respective research or study.

A research question is the question around which the research is focused. Therefore, it should be:

- Clear: Provide enough detail so that readers and the researcher can easily understand its purpose without the need for additional explanation.
- Focused: Be sufficiently narrow so that it can be answered thoroughly in the space and time available for the presentation of the Thesis.

- Concise: Express yourself in as few words as possible.
- Non-trivial: It should not be answered with a simple "yes" or "no" but requires synthesis and analysis of ideas and sources before composing an answer.
- Debatable: Your answers should be open to debate rather than accepted facts. They should ask questions on a topic that you are curious and/or enthusiastic about.

Why is a research question essential to the research process?

Research questions help writers focus their research by providing a path through the research and writing process. The specificity of a well-developed research question helps the writer avoid the "everything" role and work to support a specific, arguable thesis.

Recommendations for developing a research question:

- Choose an interesting general topic. Most professional researchers focus on topics that they are really interested in studying. Authors should choose a broad topic that they would really like to know more about. An example of a general topic might be "Slavery in the American South" or "The Movies of the 1930s".
- After having done the Systematic Literature Review, it will be possible to narrow down and specify the focus of the research or study:  
  
What issues are academics and researchers discussing when it comes to your topic? What questions come to mind when you read these articles?
- Evaluate your questions. After writing a question or even several on paper, evaluate those questions to determine if they would be effective research questions or if they need further revision and refinement.
- Is your research question clear? With so much research available on any given topic, research questions need to be as clear as possible to be effective and help the writer direct his or her

research.

- Is your research question focused? Research questions should be specific enough to be well covered in the space available.
- Is your research question complex? Research questions should not be answered with a simple "yes" or "no" or with easy-to-find facts. Instead, they should require both research and analysis on the part of the writer. They often begin with "How" or "Why."

Examples of research questions:

- Unclear question: How should social networking sites address the harm they cause? Clearer focus: What steps should social networking sites like LinkedIn or Facebook take to protect users' personal information and privacy?

The unclear version of this question does not specify which social networking sites or suggest what kind of harm the sites might be causing. It also assumes that this "harm" is proven and/or accepted. The clearer version specifies the sites (LinkedIn and Facebook), the type of potential harm (privacy issues), and who might be experiencing that harm (users). A strong research question should never leave room for ambiguity or interpretation.

- Unfocused question: What is the effect of global warming on the environment? Focused version: What is the most significant effect of melting glaciers on the lives of penguins in Antarctica?

The unfocused research question is so broad that it could not be adequately answered in a book, let alone in a thesis paper that must be done in a certain amount of time. The focused version boils down to a specific effect of global warming (melting glaciers), a specific place (Antarctica), and a specific animal that is affected (penguins). It also requires the writer to take a position on which effect has the greatest impact on the affected animal. When in doubt, ask as narrow and focused a research question as possible.



- Too Simple: How are doctors treating diabetes in the U.S.? Appropriately complex: What major environmental, behavioral, and genetic factors predict whether Americans will develop diabetes, and how can these commonalities be used to assist the medical community in preventing the disease?

The simple version of this question can be looked up online and answered in a few factual sentences; it leaves no room for analysis. The more complex version is written in two parts; it is provocative and requires both significant research and evaluation by the writer. As a rule of thumb, if a quick Google search can answer a research question, it will not be highly effective.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

The researcher should write the Methodology chapter in the future tense for the purposes of the presentation of the second component of the dissertation applied, which is the Proposal. Its inclusion as part of the Final Report of the completed research will assume the written wording of the formulated approaches, in past verbal tense.

#### *Design*

The design forms the structure of the platform of the research work, which provides the place and time where the data and evidence contemplated in the respective study will be collected. That is, how will the research work be done? The researcher must identify and justify the type of design that will be assumed in the respective study, which must be coherent and faithful to the epistemological bases of the research.

The type of design to be assumed in the research should be defined and written in the first paragraph of the methodology chapter and should also be accompanied by information regarding the methodological steps through which data or evidence will be obtained in the respective study.

If the study requires the rigor of measurement and is based on the positivist paradigm, as

well as on the data analysis techniques provided by descriptive and inferential statistics, the Quantitative Research Methodology will be assumed and the quantitative design that is assumed should be indicated.

If the research merits the interpretation based on the phenomenological epistemology of the emerging evidence in the concrete situational context where the work is developed, then the Qualitative Research Methodology will be selected and the qualitative design that is assumed must be indicated.

If it is decided to use information obtained both quantitatively and qualitatively, the Mixed Research Methodology will be selected, the specific design should be indicated.

The aspect referred to the methodological procedures to be followed in the dissertation will consider the purposes of the study, the research questions, and the selection of the design guidelines for the respective research.

This section should be written in the future tense, for the purposes of the Dissertation Proposal, and in the past tense, once the study has been completed and the Final Report of the doctoral research is submitted.

### *Participants*

This section involves identifying the Population (the totality of the phenomenon to be investigated, where the units of analysis have common characteristics) and the Sample (a part or parcel of the units of analysis of the reality to be measured or characterized) of the potential beneficiaries of the research process to be conducted. Their establishment and definition should be congruent with the problem statement and the research questions. It is recommended to avoid the selection of vulnerable populations for the purposes of the applied dissertation.

The description of the population should include data of a demographic nature, such as

age, sex, ethnicity. The procedures for selecting the sample should also be included, as well as the rationale for the sampling method to be used in the research.

### *Instruments*

This section presents the instruments that will be used to collect data or evidence in the respective research project. It should be made explicit if the instrument has been developed by another researcher, in which case it will be necessary to request written authorization from the same, as an ethical requirement that implies respect for copyright, to ensure IRB approval. Also indicate when the instrument has been designed by another author and modified by the researcher, in which case the corresponding authorization must also be requested.

The instruments produced by the doctoral candidate must also provide information on the validity and reliability criteria that have been used for their construction and that will be used in the research. In the Final Report of the dissertation applied, the calculations and analyses conducted to establish the validity and reliability of the instruments must appear as annexes.

### *Procedures*

The Procedures section is based directly on the research questions and requires the researcher to choose the method that corresponds to his or her work, according to the nature, goal, and purposes of the respective study. Its wording illustrates in detail the steps to be followed in the inquiry process that aims to answer the questions posed in the dissertation applied. It will be written in the future verb tense for the purposes of the Proposal and in the past verb tense for the purposes of the Final Report, once the corresponding research has been completed.

The procedures to be followed for the achievement of the purposes and objectives established in the research can be organized in phases or stages, which will allow the processing

of the data or evidence in an organized manner. These procedures will be written step by step and in a linear fashion.

Such a detailed description would allow for the possible replicability of the study, thus contributing to its validation.

### ***Data or Evidence Analysis***

This section sets out in detail the path followed to proceed with the analysis of the data or evidence obtained in the respective study. The selection of the type of analysis to be undertaken in the applied dissertation will be conditioned by the quantitative, qualitative, or mixed research paradigm assumed in the dissertation, as well as by the questions posed and the research design outlined for the respective study. This analysis should specify the procedures to be used to simplify and code the evidence.

To undertake the analysis of quantitative data, there is the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) among others. In recent years, some useful software programs have been developed for the qualitative analysis of evidence collected in the fieldwork of social science research. Whichever paradigm is assumed, the analysis of the information must be based on the appropriate techniques that support each of them.

### ***Limitations***

The author or doctoral student should indicate any restrictions, limitations or impediments that may affect the validity (internal or external) of the dissertation results. This section should be placed in the Methodology chapter (3) in the Proposal and should be moved to the Conclusions chapter (5) in the Final Report.

## **Chapter 4: Results**

This chapter presents the results in a grouped sequence related to the research questions. The results are presented on their own, without the corresponding theoretical discussion based on the study's frame of reference.

- The results chapter may include tables and figures, ensuring congruence with APA Standards in its presentation. It is suggested to follow a homogeneous format in the general presentation of the research results and to write in past tense.
- Appropriate use of statistical and/or qualitative language in the presentation of data or evidence should be observed.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

In the introductory paragraphs of this chapter, the summary presentation of what has been developed in the research should be made with the intention of providing an overview of the proposed study.

- Summaries and conclusions related to the main findings of the study are drawn.
- The results obtained are linked to relevant research in the area related to the study.
- The implications of the results obtained in the study are discussed.
- The limitations of the study conducted are shared.
- Recommendations are made for future studies in the same area.

## **References**

The doctoral candidate who prepares the applied dissertation should follow the guidelines for citing documentary and electronic bibliographic references, as well as authors, following the guidelines set forth in the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association Seven Edition (APA).

Do not forget to include in the text of the applied dissertation appendices, tables and figures that correspond to the respective study. The doctoral candidate must assume for the presentation of these items of the study, the orientations and guidelines contemplated in the APA Manual, as well as in the Manual of Style for the Applied Dissertation.

Books on research methodologies that are widely used by doctoral students in the USA. Some of the main ones include:

- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approach*. Sage Publications.
- Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods*. Sage Publications.
- Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. Jossey-Bass.
- Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2015). *Research methods for business students*. Pearson.
- Maxwell, J. A. (2013). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach*. Sage Publications.
- Patton, M. Q. (2014). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. Sage Publications.
- Neuman, W. L. (2014). *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Pearson.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (2018). *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*. Sage Publications.
- Babbie, E. (2016). *The practice of social research*. Cengage Learning.
- Flick, U. (2018). *An introduction to qualitative research*. Sage Publications.

